



Connecticut Working Families Organization
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February 17th, 2015

Re: Testimony in favor of HB 5858, AA Providing Funding to the Connecticut Retirement Security Board, and SB 446 AA Concerning the Definition of the Term Domestic Workers

Dear Senator Winfield, Representative Tercyak and Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee,

My name is Ana María Rivera-Forastieri and I am the Political Director of the Connecticut Working Families Organization. Working Families organizes on behalf of working and middle class families on social and economic justice issues. We have historically advocated for laws and policies that improve the quality of life of workers and their families—good wages, affordable healthcare, workplace protections and the right to collectively bargain.

Working Families would like to support two bills today:

First, HB5858, which would provide more funding to the Connecticut Retirement Security Board.

Last year, Working Families testified in support of creating a state-administered retirement savings plan. We did so for several reasons:

1. Connecticut is facing a retirement crisis. More and more workers do not have access or cannot afford a private retirement plan which forces many of us to work past the age of 65 in order to survive.
2. Wall Street has attacked our retirement system and has made huge profits at the costs of our seniors, while at the same time selling workers subpar retirement plans with high administrative fees and low rates of return.
3. The lack of retirement security for our workforce is hurting our economy. More seniors have to rely on social assistance programs than before because they do not have enough savings to support themselves. Increased poverty levels among our seniors decreases local spending and harms local business.

This legislature and our Governor took a step in the right direction by recognizing that there is a retirement crisis in our state and that the best way to address it would be through a publicly administered retirement plan. Legislation was passed to invest money to start laying the groundwork for the creation of the plan, which created a Retirement Security Board. This board is tasked with conducting a feasibility study and an implementation proposal. The Board has been meeting for the last several months and it has made a determination that it requires additional funds in order to gather more information, hire necessary experts, and develop an optimal plan for our state and our workers.

We believe that this Committee has an important choice to make—it can either make an investment that provides the Board with the necessary tools to conduct a comprehensive study or it can choose not to invest any more resources to this project and understand that it will conform to limited information and expertise. We do not believe that conformity is the right choice in creating a program that will have an enormous impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in Connecticut for decades to come.

The reasons that many of you had in supporting the creation a public retirement plan have not changed. The struggles that many of you identified in our workforce still remain. Allow the Board to continue the task of addressing those reasons by granting them the necessary funds to finish the job.

Second, SB 446, would provide protections to a group of workers that are not afforded under current labor laws.

There are approximately 40,000 domestic workers in the state of Connecticut. These workers are providing essential services to individuals and their families. Some of these include caregiving for children and elderly dependents, cleaning and house maintenance.

Domestic workers make up the most vulnerable workforce in our state because they have been excluded from major federal and state employment and labor laws.

While Connecticut has been ahead of the game on a multitude of economic justice issues, we have been unable to guarantee many of these victories to domestic workers. For example, the Connecticut Minimum Wage Act has excluded some domestic workers by narrowing the definition of employees that are covered by the state minimum wage. Our Workers Compensation law rarely covers domestic workers because it requires that they work over 26 hours a week be covered—this limitation does not apply to other workers in the state. The CT Paid Sick Days law does not cover domestic workers either, because it only applies to businesses with 50 or more employees. Lamentably, these are just some of the instances in which our laws have failed domestic workers.

We believe that legislation is necessary to protect workers and provide much needed dignity in the workplace. We urge this Committee to consider amending current Connecticut law to include these workers in its minimum wage and overtime laws, it should extend Workers Compensation to include more domestic workers and it should provide benefits like paid sick days and paid time off. Legislation should be in the form of a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which will address many of the aforementioned issues in a comprehensive manner.

Thank you,

Ana María Rivera-Forastieri